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THE SERVILE MIND.

GERTRUDE BESSE KING.

THE observation that the wish is father to the thought was never more apt than now. The will-to-believe in the strength and righteousness of one cause and the weakness and wickedness of the other successfully produces the confirming facts. In the favorable atmosphere of Germany, tales of Polish and Servian atrocities multiply, and the welcome conviction grows that the British Empire is on the point of disintegration, harassed by disaffection of the Colonies and disloyalty at home. In the fertile soil of Allied minds there blooms the Bryce report, and the conclusion can no longer be avoided that the Central Powers have passed their zenith and are now face to face with starvation and revolutionary riots within the Empires and an imminent shortage of men and ammunition upon all the fronts. The "gradual process of attrition" is believed to be defeating Germany.

The wish-to-disbelieve is no less potent. The exceptional credulity of the war mind when presented with desirable possibilities is matched by an equally exceptional resistance to those considered undesirable. Try to convince a German that the *Lusitania* was unarmed and carried no troops, or an Englishman that Allied submarines have sunk without warning unarmed merchant ships carrying women and children in the Sea of Marmora. You will see how fiercely the closed mind protects its own exclusiveness, attacking not only the unpleasant information but its innocent bearer. When I returned to England from Germany and was asked if Germany suffered from a shortage of munitions, money, and food, my evidence to the contrary made as much impression as snow upon the sea, except for the combative animosity that it aroused. When I hazarded the opinion that the average German was

more adequately informed as to the conduct of the war than the average Frenchman or Englishman, I was branded as a pro-German and discredited. In Germany when I maintained that many Englishmen were unquestionably influenced in their desire for the war by an outraged sense of Belgium's violated neutrality, I might as well have discoursed to the air, except for the suspicion I invited as an Anglophile.

The wish-to-believe not only fertilizes spurious facts and spurns unwelcome ones but alters accepted facts, subtly, enormously. On both sides in this contest, an intense atmosphere has been unconsciously generated which insidiously transforms incoming material. Fresh data is suffused so that it harmonizes with old assumptions. Only after plunging first into one electric medium of thought and then into the other can one realize how subtle, yet how considerable this alteration is. Notice a bit of information that seems to possess some individuality of its own and consider how the aspect and bearing that it wore in Berlin undergoes a sea-change upon reaching London.

The process of fact transformation is not always an easy and wholly unconscious one. Sometimes it takes a veritable artist to recolor a thoroughly Germanic fact to accord with the Allied background, or vice versa. But with patience it can be accomplished. Try the effect of suggesting, in the midst of a conversation about the war, that a submarine in the Dardanelles is under no legal immunities that do not attach to a submarine in a declared and limited war zone. Or argue that the Allies have done a fairly serious thing, from the point of view of international law, in violating the neutrality of that small State, Greece, whose sovereignty was recognised in a treaty signed by Great Britain, France, and Russia. Or maintain in the presence of German sympathizers that Belgian documents showing Belgium's desire to protect her neutrality in case of violation by Germany did not constitute an unneutral alliance. These subjects will give an excellent opportunity for delicate and hair-splitting disquisitions not unworthy

of the middle ages. Then, observing the curious mental agility which tries to establish the conclusion desired and to dodge the simple and inevitable one, ask yourself if in peace times one of your listeners would give a moment's tolerance to his own arguments.

The wonder is that such stultifying sophistry can be sincere. Yet no one believes that he is deceiving himself. Each is the victim of the occupational disease of war, now spreading to the proportions of an epidemic, a plague, a world-infection. And like some subtle maladies that induce the illusion of health in the patient, this sickness of the mind is unrecognised, and persists despite protests of impartiality. Sometimes there is a dim perception of disquieting symptoms indicated in the impatient remark, "This is no time to be judicial." If the patient wishes to imply that this is no time for weak emotions, who would disagree? But if, as is more likely, he means to let strong emotions excuse weak arguments, he gives up even the attempt to preserve mental health, preferring debility.

The wholesome function of the mind in Plato's dream was to rule like a king enthroned above conflicting instincts and desires, directing all in harmony. To-day the mind has abdicated this high authority and become the slave of desire—a great and noble desire possibly, but none the less an enslaving one. Conversation has degenerated into slander that does not stop short of the indictment of a whole nation, probably four or eight as the case may be; the press reflecting and exaggerating popular pressure is vivid with bitterness and tame with cant; our very historians have become pamphleteers.

Why and how did it happen? Must it, should it be?

It happened because popular feeling has to be mobilized behind the war if it is to be waged successfully. Unless the people make the war they labor in vain that make it. The time has passed when a diplomat of one of the great civilized nations dares to pledge his country to a serious foreign policy that is not backed, or is not capable of being backed, "when the facts come out," by the will of the

majority. Whatever the forms of these different governments, they all have in fact, and in this sense, responsible ministries. The connection between government and people may not be equally obvious under different forms of organization but the vital responsiveness is there, whether an Italian mob is forcing the hands of the diplomats or Sir Edward Grey on a famous Monday evening is igniting the emotions and delicately feeling the pulse of the English nation, or the Kaiser from his Imperial balcony is both hypnotizing and expressing the will of Germany.

The old distinctions between the civil and military population have lost much of their former significance. For to-day every cog in the national machine is of unprecedented importance. The war is waged not only by the soldier but by the baker, the manufacturer, the engineer, the farmer, the small investor, the women. Unless, therefore, the emotions of the entire country can be keyed up to volunteer pitch and maintained at the point of fighting efficiency, the war machine loses momentum.

In order to fire popular imagination some "just cause" is essential. In small countries whose national existence is obviously bound up with economic interests and accessions of territory, it is possible to find fairly straightforward statements as to reasons for declaring war. In greater nations where the connection is not so obvious, it is essential to have a fairly clear case of self-defense, or some noble principle like the sanctity of treaties or the protection of small states, to give the proper glow and heat to patriotism. Lacking one or the other of these reasons as Italy has lacked them, the country suffers in divided feeling and half-heartedness in waging the war. It is not strange that aggressive measures on Italy's part at the Dardanelles or Salonica have been refused. Consequently we find each side making the most of the idea that it is upholding civilization against barbarism.

As soon, therefore, as war becomes imminent, every available agency is employed to play upon the powerful

passion of patriotism. It is stimulated by appeals to loyalty, to fear, to love of home, to revenge, to self-interest, to religious feeling, to honor, to chivalry, to self-defense, to justice and to those vague and potent emotions that centre about one's background and early intimacies that intensify the sense of race. Like a conflagration the dormant force of patriotism spreads and gathers momentum until it sweeps a nation into self ignoring dedication to—slaughter. By the time war is actually launched not only the war emotion but the war mind has been created. It has become a hardened, nationalized function. Thought as an international possession has disappeared. In its place partisan patriotism is trying to wear the ill-fitting garments of logic. If any minds are still to be found who refuse this debasing allegiance they invite suspicion and scorn. They who persist in honoring truth are no longer honored.

The war mind is defended both by belligerents and by their sympathizers in neutral countries. This contest appears as a struggle between democracy and autocracy, between a regard for the sacredness of treaties on the one hand, and reliance upon treachery and brute force on the other, between civilization and barbarism. In the face of such issues, it is argued that neutrality is impossible, immoral. One cannot do otherwise than side with the forces that make for righteousness and stake one's faith upon their ultimate success. To urge freedom of speech and thought at such a moment verges upon treachery. What is essential, it is said, is not criticism of the government and of one's cause, but public confidence. We do not ask spectacled grinds to give endless re-statements of minute flaws or weaknesses; the large facts stand out, and in their light we need enthusiasm, action. We want conviction, not a tepid judicial temper; patriotism, not academic discriminations. In short, we require recruits, not professors. The Hobsons, Shaws, Rollands and Giolittis, who tell us the wrongs that we have committed and the fact that our enemies are after all such men as we, are losing

opportunities for public service to which the fiery-tongued Lloyd Georges, Lord Derbys and d'Annunzios have risen, aided, let us add, by the Chauvinism of the Jingo press.

This being so, what mental attitude should be encouraged? Should the scientific historian hibernate until a more appropriate season, unless he lowers himself to the level of the propagandist? Should he make use of the influence that his disinterested scholarship has given him to increase the bias of those whose confidence he has won, gaining credence under false pretenses? Or should he refuse to prostitute his profession, to cheat the public, holding inviolate his honor as a thinker? Is hospitality and sanity and balance of the mind a desirable achievement, or a mild form of treason?

What is required to maintain the nation at fighting efficiency is not primarily a war mind but a war will. Nor are the two inseparable. Indeed, they are frequently at violent odds. The inflamed emotions upon which the war mind depends are necessarily unstable and transient. Sensationalism as a driving force is capricious and insatiable in its demands for increasing stimulus. The eagerness with which the Cavell incident was seized and exploited is a distressing illustration. The nation whose spiritual capital is an overwrought pseudo-patriotism is bound to feel the lag and drag of abated popular interest as soon as the first mad months are over. After a brief bright fury excelsior enthusiasms subside and leave behind light ashes for the wind. Intemperate appeals and vilifications do not bring the best recruits or tend to keep firm the national purpose. If a people's loyalty is not fundamentally sound and well organized in time of peace, it cannot undergo too violent a transformation at the summons of war. The attempt to make good by rhetoric, flaming posters and brass bands the deficiencies of a poor industrial system or weaknesses due to national laziness is doomed to futility. The demands of war are exacting and sustained. They cannot be met by ephemeral emotionalism.

The partisan feeling which has taken captive the sovereign mind loses its first imperiousness, and little by little the war mind begins to assert some of its former independence. Even when most enslaved, it is an uncertain quantity. Despite its protection against disconcerting facts, there are limits to its resistance to the gradual advances of truth. Newspaper readers discover from the official reports that trenches are "retaken" which were never admitted to have been lost. Soldiers at the front find that daily association with the enemy shows them to be anything but brutes and blackguards. The large movements of the war demonstrate an enemy efficiency which even the war mind cannot blink. Unless falsities to cover up falsities can be produced with sufficient cumulative effect, the war mind becomes a dangerous slave.

The war will should not be backed by a servile mind and a sentimental and inflated patriotism. England's fighting strength at the front is due in no small degree to the sporting sang-froid of her unsentimental Tommies. The soldier is fortunate in lacking the debilitating bitterness so assiduously cultivated by the daily press at home. Judging from letters and many conversations, it seems to awaken in him only annoyance and disgust.

England's fighting strength at home is in proportion as war is conceived as a business, requiring coolness, training, intelligence, discipline, organization. To foster the war mind with its inability to calculate the enemy's strength, to see him clearly, to foresee his moves, his motives and his possibilities is to court disaster. To be forced to pamper a war mind in the public which has to be nourished on successes and placated at the expense of strategy is a serious handicap. Solid co-operation between people and government is founded on two factors—confidence, and a sense of identity of interest. These are to be attained by other means than by encouraging war rage at the cost of a wholesome public mind.

Free, normal minds are capable of great service to their country in producing a steadying influence not only now,

but no less in the critical period of adjustment after the war. They furnish the temperate atmosphere without which agreement between the rival groups is impossible. Excessive and ridiculous demands on both sides, backed by extravagant confidence, is hardly conducive to mutual concessions. The question arises how to prepare for proposals of peace, a public that has set up standards of impossible accomplishment and nourished implacable hatreds. Above all, how make the transition from a world in arms to a world in peaceful interrelations. Many adjustments will have to be made, many difficulties tided over. The greatest of these will consist in internal rather than in external frictions. The unnatural excitement of war will give way to reaction. Party differences, local troubles, suspicions of graft, mismanagement, inefficiency, high-handedness, misrepresentation, corruption, will assert themselves and make trouble. With the disappearance of a threatening foe the heightened feelings so long exploited will seek outlets at home. In four of the great contending nations I have heard malcontents remark, "After the war there'll be a serious reckoning." A disappointing peace—and how can it be otherwise than disappointing to most of the nations involved?—will raise the issue as to why the war was launched at all, and blood will cry from the ground for vengeance. At best it will be a treacherous time, full of difficult political, economic, psychological adaptations, at worst it will spell what it may spell in Russia. Then indeed all that men of sturdy minds have done to combat the shallow violence of mob-thought will count in modifying the fury of reaction.

What after all is at the bottom of our tenderness for war illusions? Is it fear? Of what are we afraid? Do we care to imply that the case of nations whose interests are ours will collapse upon undue exposure? Do we lack the courage of our convictions to such an extent that we dare not open our minds, dare not face simple actual facts, or attempt to weigh their essential values? Because we scorn

to be neutral in sympathy or indifferent as to outcome, do we therefore scorn to seek the neutral mind?

There is no other mind worthy of the name. Unquestionably we desire the responsible maturity which enables men to remain clear-eyed and just even when following the dictates of a loyal allegiance. It is not easy of attainment. To keep an even, undaunted mind in the midst of present storms is almost impossible. We must decide, however, and with vigor, whether we mean to add a little to the general sanity. If we do not so resolve we shall inevitably submit to decision by inertia, which is a decision against the freedom of thought. We cannot, even in our own minds, hope to stem the terrific tide of revolt against reason by any meagre efforts. We shall have to fight as a swimmer fights both the bullying onslaughts of the waves and the insidious undertow.

The war mind introduces serious elements of danger to the national life besides instability in war and revolution thereafter. When men lose the power to weigh with impartiality the issues brought before them, they have lost the faculties upon which the hope of democratic government is based. If we allow and encourage the bias that paralyses judgment, we pollute the springs that feed a stable democracy. We must count upon a progressively critical, sceptical public opinion, incapable of degradation, either by money, interest or feeling, though these be on a national scale. Such a popular mind does not of course exist, but it is for us to determine whether we shall increase or decrease the possibilities of that mind.

Some of us aspire toward a state where you can fool fewer and fewer of the people less and less of the time. It behooves us, therefore, to try to preserve to the full measure of our powers the intellectual integrity which is the foundation of such a commonwealth. The "man in the street" must think straight if he hopes to fulfil his function in a successful state. We whose ultimate hope rests in that same "man in the street" can serve our country in no greater, perhaps no more courageous, way than by hold-

ing firmly to our own mental integrity. Whatever our allegiance in sympathy and purpose, let us bring back to full authority our slavish minds. We can thus do ourselves and our country the honor of refusing to surrender to desire the sovereign rights of thought.

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